

questioning at the feet of the teachers in the Temple, becomes aware of, and claims, his belonging to God. In his Father's house, He takes on a new mantle. Jesus is clothed in a new and developing understanding of who (and whose) he is. And all who hear him are amazed; and his parents - astonished! They will need to clothe themselves in new ways as they continue to nurture their firstborn son in adulthood.

The Temple becomes a kind of home for Jesus, and Luke will take us back there many times: Jesus will one day have to "clean house," because he understands the significance of whose house it really is.<sup>1</sup> Stephen Bauman writes, "His Father's house is his house too and demands his attention. Where is our attention?" Do we see the church as our home?

Is church a place where we can talk together about things that matter?

It is not unusual to hear comments from visitors and newcomers to this chapel, about its pervading mantle of peace. As it is lovingly clothed and re-clothed from one liturgical season to the next, we are all drawn closer to the divine mystery – even without words. We are invited to be our authentic selves, before God and one another.

As we move through the Christmas season towards the ending of this year, may we honour and celebrate the place of 'church' in our lives, acknowledge both the personal and collective seasons through which we move (whatever our age and stage), and be prepared to take on new mantles – to clothe ourselves in new spiritual garments as we continue our faith journey.

And whether we are greeted with enthusiastic leaps or the subtle emergence of change in others around us, may we not be astonished, feel lost or think we are losing loved ones, but with God's help embrace the change, and adjust our mantle, knowing that the Christ of God – Emmanuel – is already in it.

In the name of God.....

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_december\\_30\\_2018](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_december_30_2018)

### Readings:

1 Sam.2:18-20, 26; Col.3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

"Hi, Happy Christmas – whooa, that's quite a greeting" so I gasp, reeling from the enthusiastic leap of a canine family member as I squeeze through the gates of my elder son's home on Christmas Day. It really doesn't seem that long since our third child, Thomas, was a placid preschooler, patiently pottering in the background while his two big sisters demanded attention. But on this occasion - twenty-five years on - in the somewhat chaotic backyard gathering of extended family (and an exuberant collection of dogs somewhat reminiscent of a Hairy Maclary pack), I eventually realise that son Thomas is missing. I learn that he is out walking his most recently acquired second greyhound, to meet our elder daughter and her two miniature rescue dogs, enabling the canines to familiarize on neutral ground.

Funny really – David and I would never have expected our children to be avid dog-enthusiasts! Our loved ones can be full of surprises – and no doubt we have at times surprised or confused (perhaps even amazed!) our parents and others with the decisions we've made and the directions our lives have taken. I know how disappointed my parents were, when on leaving high school after four years, I chose not to attend university. And how, when I confessed my call to ordained ministry, my husband's response was "I feel like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff"!

I wonder how Mary and Joseph coped with their son Jesus, the decisions he made and the direction of his life in God..... Imagine the parental bed-time conversations in those early days as they nurtured him and watched him grow – as they shared with him the stories of their faith and wondered at his destiny... Do you – like me – wonder what Jesus was like as a child....and as a teenager...as a son and as a brother?

We have nothing more than a glimpse of Jesus' childhood in our holy scriptures. While later legend as recorded in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas describes the child Jesus gathering together the waters of a stream and bringing clay birds to life, it is only today's gospel account of the boy Jesus at age twelve, that offers (a

canonically) an accepted revelation of his early relationship with his parents, community, Jewish faith- practice and heavenly Father. What a shock it must have been for his parents to discover the boy Jesus missing from their care during their return journey from Jerusalem. We can well imagine the anxiety of the Nazarean couple during the three-day search of the holy city following the festival of Passover. That sick-to-the-stomach, fear-inducing, adrenalin-pumping parental panic that feeds our imagination and drives our searching.

I clearly remember those feelings when - on a hot summer's day (much like yesterday) - our then preschool son Thomas momentarily eluded us in the crowded Botanic Gardens playground. Thoughts of child-abduction or drowning flooded my mind as we searched for what seemed an eternity, but was in fact, only a few minutes. I stumbled upon him, squatting on the popular new pathway, deciphering interesting letters and patterns stamped in the concrete – utterly oblivious to our desperate concern.

“Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” was Jesus' response to Mary's astonished and (I think, quite reasonably) aggrieved questioning. Or in more modern speak “Chill out Ma – I was hanging at the Big Man's place”. Jesus – in his developing independence – had no thought of being lost. At that moment, he wasn't the one who was lost! I can't help but notice that his mother Mary – in today's passage - calls her twelve-year-old Jesus 'child'. And I do wonder how Jesus feels – seated now with adult men, the Temple teachers, questioning intelligently and commenting with a depth of understanding beyond his years –as his mother speaks to him so....

A mother holding on to her transitioning son's childhood; an adolescent son not feeling the least bit lost, following the call of his heart without a thought to his parents' feelings – oh, its all so very human and familiar! I, for one, am grateful to Luke's gospel for the inclusion of this cameo of holy family dynamics, even as it also reveals so much more about the divine call and destiny of Jesus, and his ongoing obedience to his parents. We read that Mary 'treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour'.

Returning to last Tuesday in Christchurch. It was a wonderful Christmas Day family gathering – husband, children & spouses/partners plus six dogs – with

simple gifts given and received, food and conversation aplenty, until darkness fell, when all – four-legg-eds and two-legg-eds - settled into the comfortable and contented silence and peace of Love's presence. But there were also absences felt – beloved parents and grandparents no longer with us in this life. And.... I have to wait until late January to reunite with my second daughter and her family, catching up then, with our two little granddaughters who are rapidly growing and changing.

At Christmas-time, and at other religious & family celebrations we often become acutely aware of the changes taking place amongst us – especially in the younger members of our families. Children - nephews & nieces, grandchildren & great-grandchildren -surprise us, as they seem to grow half a metre taller with each year's passing. And the changes are not just physical. The placid baby of last year is now walking and soaking up new words like a sponge. Last year's talkative pre-adolescent might now sit self-consciously in a corner, absorbed on his phone.

I remember with fondness, sewing new Christmas dresses for my young daughters each year. It was always a strong reminder of just how much they had grown; and it was a special labour of love, almost a ritual – recognizing and celebrating the growth that had taken place over the preceding twelve months (and of course, it was more than simply physical growth). They were clothed not only in new garments, but in new ways of being – new ways of living and expressing themselves and that often meant we, as parents, also needed to adjust our mantle – to reclothe ourselves - in our parenting role.

Less than a week ago, we recalled Mary wrapping her first-born in swaddling clothes and laying him in a manger. Today (in our gospel story), Jesus is twelve years old – in Jewish terms – becoming an adult. No doubt Mary has each year, been clothing him in new garments. [Reminiscent of Hannah, who brought new garments to young Samuel each year, in the Temple]. No doubt Mary has been celebrating - along with Joseph – Jesus' growth and development. And now, as a becoming-adult, he is ready to take on for himself the Jewish law, which requires him to attend the annual festival of Passover.

But along with this major family and cultural shift from child to adult (with all its accompanying requirements), comes a major identity shift. Jesus, listening and